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ABSTRACT

A study compared the publication rates of solicited and unsolicited articles in refereed and nonrefereed journals. Editors from 98 psychology and education journals supplied information regarding the number of solicited and unsolicited articles they received each year, length of time between acceptance and publication, and designation of the journal as refereed or nonrefereed. Unsolicited articles made up 96.5% of the 31,077 articles received for possible publication in 1978. The remaining 3.5% were written by invitation from the journal's staff members or officers of their sponsoring organizations. Twenty percent of the articles received were accepted for publication. Of the articles that were published, 82.5% were unsolicited. Acceptance rates for unsolicited articles ranged from .2% to nearly 100%. The average time between acceptance and publication was six months. Eighty-three percent of the editors reported that their journals were refereed, while the remaining editors reported that the review of unsolicited articles was handled by their staff. The findings suggest that authors should examine the editorial practices of a journal before submitting. The chance that an article will be published approaches 100% if it is written by invitation, while the chance drops to 1% when the article is unsolicited. Large numbers of rejects were assured as one-third of the articles were submitted to only six journals. However, 25% of the journals accepted over 50% of the articles they received, indicating that there is clearly an opportunity to publish carefully placed articles. (HTH)

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Journal Article

Publication Rates

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Abstract

The publication rates of solicited and unsolicited articles and refereed and non-refereed journals are compared. Lengths of time required for acceptance or rejection and publication of articles are reported.

Little documentation exists regarding the percentage of published articles which are solicited and the percentage that is selected from unsolicited contributions. Statements regarding the relative merits of refereed and non-refereed journals tend to be offered freely without supporting data that compares the degree of selectivity involved in identifying the articles that appear in different types of journals.

To answer these questions, I surveyed 266 psychology and education journals. Of the 123 questionnaires that were returned, 98 were usable.

The editors were asked to supply information regarding the (1) number of articles they receive and publish each year, (2) number of these articles that are solicited and unsolicited, (3) length of time required for a response when an article is submitted for publication, (4) length of time between acceptance and publication of an article, (5) the cost to the author of having an article published, and (6) a designation of the journal as refereed or non-refereed.

The 98 journals studied received 31,077 articles for possible publication in 1978. Twenty percent of these articles were accepted for publication.

Unsolicited articles make up 96.5 percent of the articles received by editors for possible publication. The remaining 3.5 percent were written by invitation, by the journal's staff members or officers of their sponsoring organizations.

Articles selected from the 29,993 unsolicited manuscripts that were received constituted 82.5 percent of those that were published. The remaining 17.5 percent of the published articles were written by invitation, by the journal's staff members or officers of their sponsoring organizations.

Authors of unsolicited articles had 17 percent of their articles accepted for publication while their colleagues who were invited by journal editors to write articles were assured that their articles would be published before they wrote them.

Acceptance rates for unsolicited articles ranged from two tenths of one percent to nearly 100 percent. Twelve percent of the journals accepted less than 10 percent of the unsolicited articles they received. Thirty-eight percent accepted less than 20 percent of their unsolicited articles while 51 percent accepted one-fourth or fewer of their unsolicited articles. Editors of one-fourth of the journals report that they accepted more than 50 percent of the unsolicited articles they received. Two editors reported that they published more unsolicited articles than they received during the year.

One-third of all unsolicited articles submitted were received by six of the 98 journals. The average journal received 306 unsolicited articles and published 52. The number of articles published by the journals during the year ranged from 12 to 222. Fourteen of the journals published more than 100 articles during the year while 15 percent published fewer than 25.

Fifty-three percent of the journals follow the American Psychological Association style manual while twenty-two percent follow the University of Chicago style manual. Six percent follow the Modern Language Association style manual. Eleven percent use their own style manual while eight percent do not follow a specific manual.

The average time between the receipt of an unsolicited article and notification of the author regarding its acceptance or rejection is three months. Ten percent of the editors notify authors within one month while six percent report an average response time of six months or more.

The average time between acceptance and publication was six months. Fourteen percent of the editors reported an average delay of three months while ten percent averaged one year or more. The time between acceptance and publication was greatly affected in several cases where editors hold certain articles for inclusion in issues which focus on specific topics.

Five of the 98 journals required authors to pay to have their articles published. These charges ranged from fifteen to fifty dollars per printed page with the average being thirty-five dollars. Three editors report that they ask authors to pay the typesetting costs involved in producing tables. One editor reported that payment is optional in those cases where the author's employer is not willing to pay the publication cost.

Eighty-three percent of the editors report that their journals are refereed. The remaining editors report that the review of unsolicited articles is handled by their staff. Included among the journals which do not use a panel of referees in their article selection process are three of the ten most selective journals. The refereed journals accepted 20.3 percent of the unsolicited articles they received while 8.5 percent of the articles submitted to journals that are not refereed were accepted.

Twenty-four percent of the articles published by non-refereed journals were written by invitation, staff members or officers of the sponsoring organization. Fourteen percent of the articles published in

refereed journals were solicited articles. Nearly one-third (31.6 percent) of the total number of articles published can be accounted for by combining the number of solicited articles that appeared in refereed journals and the number that appeared in those journals that are not refereed.

Discussion

Those who are involved in the preparation and submission of articles to journals face a one in five chance of having their articles published. The chance that an article will be published approaches 100 percent before it is written when it is written by invitation, by a member of the journal's staff or an officer of the sponsoring organization. The chance that an article will be published drops to seventeen percent when it is an unsolicited article.

The chance that an article will be published depends heavily upon the journal's editorial practices. The odds are obviously against the acceptance of an unsolicited article in journals which devote a large percentage of their space to solicited articles. Journals which devote each issue to a selected topic often find it necessary to reject quality articles or hold them for a long period of time before publishing them.

Authors should examine the editorial practices of a journal before submitting an article to it. Large numbers of rejections are assured when one-third of the articles submitted to the 98 journals were received by six journals. When twenty-five percent of the journals studied accept over fifty percent of the articles they receive there is clearly an opportunity to publish carefully placed articles.

The practice of regarding refereed journals as being more selective than those journals which aren't refereed was not supported by the findings of this study. Those who wish to make such distinctions must look to factors other than comparative selectivity rates to justify their statements.